

Assignment: *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*

Discussion questions:

1. Gender roles always present conflicts between teenagers and their parents. What makes these conflicts more acute for immigrant families—for the children and for the parents? Be prepared to address specific conflicts within the García family.
2. In the past, exiles could generally not return easily to their home countries. Today, and especially in the case of immigrants to the U.S. from Central and Latin America as well as the Caribbean, there is a constant flow of family and friends back and forth across borders. Does this exchange make assimilation a more complicated process for Hispanics than for other minority groups? What kinds of language problems does it present? How is this coming-and-going represented by Alvarez in the structure of her novel?
3. Because Alvarez has inverted the time sequence of her stories in the novel, it is difficult to refer to events as “earlier” or “later.” How does this technique add to the reader’s understanding of the uncertainty and instability in the García girls’ own lives. How does it reflect their own ambiguities?
4. Fifi feels different from her sisters: “a statue carved out of wood like the kind I used to pore over, as if staring at those little talismanic wooden carvings would somehow be my Madeleine, bringing back my past to me like they say tasting that cookie did for Proust. But the textbooks never triggered any four-volume memory in my head.” (p. 221)

Within the group of sisters, Fifi’s lack of memory and her struggle to reconstruct her bilingual self makes her the most rebellious against her circumstances. How does the intervention of her sisters in her relationship to Manuel Gustavo show the axes of Dominican Republic machismo and U.S. feminism?

5. The novel has many moments of cultural dislocation: Yolanda with Rudy, Sandi and Doña Charito, etc. Think about those moments and try to describe one that you or someone you know has experienced.

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